

Many modern words have their roots in Greek Myths. The story of Arachne and her challenge to the goddess Athena reveals the basis for spiders being called *arachnids*.

## Arachne

by  
Max J. Herzberg

On another occasion Athena contested<sup>1</sup> for honors with a mortal. This mortal was Arachne. Her father was Idmon, skilled in the art of dyeing in purple, and from infancy the girl had been taught her father's art, joined with that of weaving. In all the land there was none that surpassed her. So conceited did she become that, lifting her head proudly to the skies, she challenged Athena herself, patron of the arts of the household, to compete with her.

Pallas Athena had watched the progress that Arachne was making, and when she heard the presumptuous challenge, she assumed the guise of an old woman and came to the spindle at which Arachne was weaving.

"I am," she said, "a woman old in experience, and I have seen much in this wide world. To me has come the knowledge of your challenge to Athena. Let me counsel you to withdraw your words. You surpass and shall surpass all other mortals, but how vain and foolish it is to contend with the immortal gods, from whom comes all skill!"

"Be silent, foolish old woman," replied Arachne scornfully. "I fear not Athena, but shall put her to shame with my skill. Let her appear and put me to the test."



Even as she spoke, Athena threw off her disguise and in solemn majesty stood before the girl.

"Athena is here," she said; and at her words Arachne trembled and realized too late how insane had been her challenge. But she summoned up her courage and began to weave her most skillful web. She wove the web in all colors, but mostly in the royal purple of which her father was the master. At last her work was complete.

Then Athena began to weave, and she depicted wondrous scenes in high Olympus, and from her very web floated forth divine fragrance of nectar and ambrosia. An unearthly beauty hovered over the design. In the corner Athena pictured the fate that had come to mortals who had defied the gods, and as she went from one to the other Arachne began to feel doom stealing closer and closer. As the last corner was completed, Athena turned to her, touched her with her magic spindle, and said:

"Punished shall you be for your presumption, but the gods will not let die such skill as you have shown. Change to an insect, that other mortals may take warning from you, but ever weave a web of marvelous design."

<sup>1</sup>**Contested**—competed

At the words of Athena, Arachne began to shrink and shrivel. Shortly she was completely transformed. Where a girl had stood an insect crawled—the spider; and before the eyes of the

terrified beholders it scuttled off to a corner and immediately began weaving a web of shimmering threads. So to this day the Greeks call the spider “arachne.”

## Damon and Pythias

by  
Max J. Herzberg

Among the most admired heroes of ancient times were the two friends, Damon and Pythias, who became models of loyalty.

It is likely that these men actually existed. According to the story, they were subjects of the tyrant Dionysius, who ruled over Syracuse in Sicily during the fifth century. Both Damon and Pythias were renowned for their wisdom and goodness, but in some manner of which there is no record, Pythias incurred the anger of the tyrant and was condemned by him to death. He bore the sentence bravely, but he asked Dionysius to grant him one favor—permission to go home and settle his affairs. Damon offered to be a hostage for the safe return of his friend.

The tyrant agreed to let Pythias go.

“But you must be here by such and such an hour,” he warned him, “or your friend will die for you.”

Pythias set out for his home, which was a considerable distance away. He settled his affairs, divided his goods among his kinsfolk, and set out on his way back to Syracuse. Unfortunately,



however, he was delayed at every turn. First it was a river swollen with floods that he had to ford, and then a tremendous storm made the road impassable. He struggled on desperately, and reached Syracuse in the very nick of time, for the executioner was already lifting up his sword to behead Damon. Pythias forced his way through the spectators, and cried out:

“Hold your sword! Here I am!” and knelt down to receive the blow. But Dionysius was so filled with astonishment and admiration at the loyalty of the friends that he pardoned Pythias, and even asked that he might be admitted to his and Damon’s friendship.